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Часопис излази једном годишње

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Die Zeitschrift erscheint einmal jährlich.

ISSN 1451-7817

UDC 930.25(497.113 Novi Sad)

ГОДИШЊАК ИСТОРИЈСКОГ АРХИВА ГРАДА НОВОГ САДА

Година IV, број 4

JAHRBUCH

DES HISTORISCHEN ARCHIVS
DER STADT NOVI SAD

Jahrgang 4, Nummer 4

Нови Сад
Novi Sad
2010

The achievement of finishing above the dominant "big four" of Red Star, Dinamo, Partizan and Hajduk is all the more remarkable if one considers that Vojvodina had been relegated from the First Federal League just three years earlier. Following this unexpected success an article in *Tempo*, describing the club's 'phoenix'-like resurrection, notes that a number of hitherto anonymous young players from little known lower league teams had played a pivotal role in Vojvodina's victory. The article concludes by stating that the 'promising club' has a bright future and that 'a team made for tomorrow has triumphed today'.² Head coach Ljupko Petrović stated that his team had deservedly won the league and attributed a large portion of this success to the stability, work ethic and friendly relations which were in place at the football club.³ Vojvodina's attractive football of the 1988-89 season also ensured that its stadium was often packed with delighted spectators, while the jubilation contributed to the founding of the "Red Firm" supporters' group – an organisation for the most enthusiastic young fans who gathered together to cheer on their team with coordinated chanting, flags, banners, drums and pyrotechnics. A contemporary letter from a member of this group joyfully explained to the rest of the country the celebratory mood which gripped both Novi Sad and the newly formed "Red Firm", noting that the crucial victory over Sloboda had been greeted with 'champagne, kisses, congratulations' and a heartfelt rendition of "Voj, Voj, Voj, Vojvodina".⁴ Unbridled euphoria gripped everyone involved at the club and it appeared as though the unexpected championship title could propel FK Vojvodina to ever greater heights. But unfortunately this fleeting sporting success is only one side of a very complex story...

Off the pitch, problems were mounting for the club. Broader events which occurred during the course of the 1988-89 season sowed seeds which were to have a lasting impact upon FK Vojvodina in the form of political interference, financial insolvency and nationalist hooliganism. The fact that all was not well, even at the crowning moment of sporting glory, is demonstrated by the aforementioned *Tempo* article. Having described Vojvodina's momentous season, the article goes on to discuss the club's financial difficulties with star player Miloš Šestić. Šestić, noting that Vojvodina was indebted to virtually everyone, stated his hope that:

The responsible structures of the city and the province will sit

² Pejić, D. (1989), "Lale' opet na Olimpiu", *Tempo*, Belgrade, 7 June.

³ Petrović, L. cited in: Pejić, "Lale' opet na Olimpiu", *Tempo*.

⁴ Deja, "Red Firm" Novi Sad, "Novi Sad se budi", in: Marković, R. (ed.) (1989) "Tribina Navijača", *Tempo*, Belgrade, 19 July, p.35

UDC 061.237:796.332(497.113 Novi Sad)j:32"1988/1991"

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FK "VOJVODINA", "RED FIRM" AND THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE "YOGURT REVOLUTION": 1988-1991

ABSTRACT: This essay examines a turbulent period in the history of FK Vojvodina Novi Sad. Utilising contemporary media sources and an interview with supporters of the club, the essay places developments surrounding FK Vojvodina into a broader historical context, demonstrating that political events such as the 1988 Yogurt Revolution had a lasting impact upon the club. The second strand of the article plots the emergence of the "Red Firm" supporters' group, from its founding during the victorious 1988-89 season, through its "Yugoslav orientated" phase, and its subsequent descent into nationalist behaviour and hooliganism. This is achieved by focusing upon one particular event – the February 1990 match between FK Vojvodina and Dinamo Zagreb, which was the first game in Novi Sad to spark serious politically motivated incidents between Serb and Croat football supporters. Specifically, it is argued that this episode served as a dress rehearsal for the infamous Maksimir stadium riot which occurred only three months later. More broadly, the essay seeks to demonstrate the benefits of examining developments surrounding particular football clubs and their supporters in order to gain a deeper insight into the political and social history of a region during times of acute political upheaval.

KEY WORDS: Football, FK Vojvodina, Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, Socialist Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, "Red Firm", Yogurt Revolution.

In a match against Sloboda Tuzla which took place on the 31st of May 1989, FK Vojvodina stunned Yugoslavia's football community by winning the First Federal League for only the second time in its 75 year history.

¹ Todorović, V. & M. Gavrilović, *Osamdeset srećno-besna godina: FK Vojvodina 1914-1994* (Novi Sad: FK Vojvodina, 1994), p.131

down soon and come to an agreement about what kind of Vojvodina they want. If they opt for continuation at the summit, they will have to loosen the purse-strings ... I am sure that sense will prevail and that nobody will allow this team to crumble...⁵

This optimistic statement nevertheless hints at the level of political involvement and interference to which FK Vojvodina, like most Yugoslav clubs, was subjected during this period. As will become apparent, subsequent media scandals would "expose" massive levels of corruption within the club and seek to blame the perilous state of affairs upon the previous misrule by "autonomist" politicians and officials. However, developments on the terraces would prove even more inflammatory.

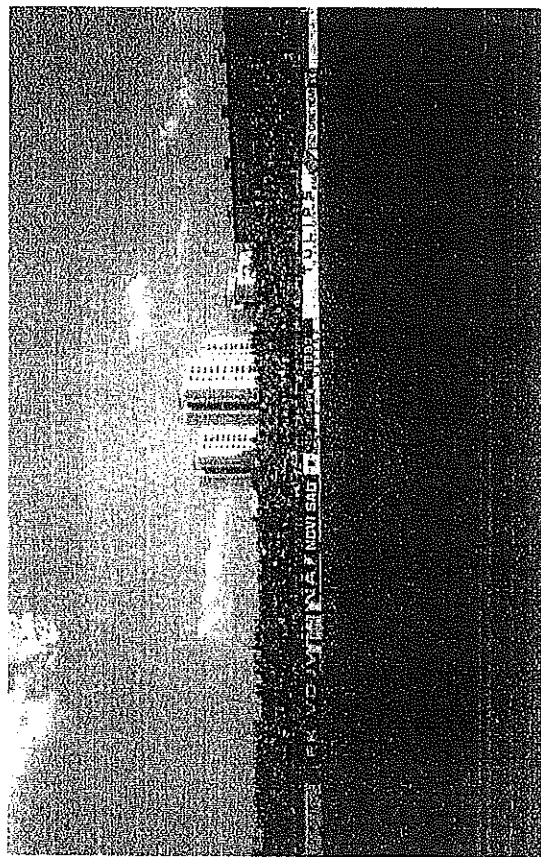


FIGURE 1: Vojvodina supporters crammed into the Novi Sad stadium to watch their team beat Red Star Belgrade during the victorious 1988–89 season.⁶

Utilising newspaper and periodical articles, supporters' letters and an interview with members of the "Red Firm" supporters' group, this essay will attempt to shed light upon the history of FK Vojvodina between 1988 and 1991 by examining the broader political developments which were

⁵ Šestić, M. cited in: Pejić, 'Lale' opet na Olimpu', *Tempo*

⁶ Photo used with the permission of Miroslav, Red Firm, FK Vojvodina Supporters' Group, Novi Sad, Serbia, 8 November 2007.

taking place across Yugoslavia, and more specifically in the Socialist Autonomous Province of Vojvodina [*Socijalistička Autonomna Pokrajina (SAP) Vojvodina*]. It will be argued that the tempestuous events of the "Yogurt Revolution" and the spreading of ethnically motivated politics throughout Yugoslavia were both reflected and exacerbated inside Yugoslav football stadiums. Moreover, contrary to the findings of prior research, it is important to state that this phenomenon was by no means restricted to the "big four" clubs, as an examination of FK Vojvodina and its "Red Firm" supporters' group – which went on to display a far darker character less than a year after its optimistic founding – will seek to demonstrate. To this end, this investigation seeks to add the experiences of Vojvodina Province's principal team to the historical record, whilst highlighting the existence of similar trends across Yugoslavia's First Federal League. Having placed contemporary Yugoslav football into context by evaluating the key political developments, this essay will focus upon one particular event – a match between FK Vojvodina and Dinamo Zagreb, which took place in Novi Sad in February 1990. It will be argued that the nationalist outbursts surrounding this encounter were, in the words of one "Red Firm" member, 'a turning point for Novi Sad',⁷ as the hitherto peaceful and politically unfazed Vojvodina stadium succumbed to a day of ethnically and politically motivated violence involving Dinamo Zagreb's "Bad Blue Boys" supporters' group and mixed factions of Serbian fans who coalesced around "Red Firm". From these events it is possible to conclude that this period in the history of FK Vojvodina left a very mixed legacy for the club and its supporters.

Academic Research and Media Coverage

Allen Guttmann has noted that most historians 'now acknowledge the political implications of sport'⁸ and a number of academics from various disciplines have focused their attentions upon the interaction between sport and politics in the former Yugoslavia. Hence, before proceeding it will be useful to consider the relevant findings which have been made in this field. The significant political role played by football supporters' groups during the period which witnessed the disintegration of both Yugoslavia and its

⁷ Miroslav from the author's group interview with Ognjen, Miroslav and Nebojša – Red Firm, FK Vojvodina Supporters' Group, Novi Sad, Serbia, 8 November 2007.

⁸ Guttmann, A. (2003) "Sport, Politics and the Engaged Historian", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38:3, p.363

First Federal League has been partially examined by Serbian and Croatian sociologists such as Ivan Čolović, Benjamin Perasović, Srdan Vrcan and Dražen Lalić.⁹ This research proves that many Yugoslav supporters indulged in politically motivated nationalist chanting, ethnic violence and rioting throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. Vrcan and Lalić have demonstrated that Yugoslav 'football fans acted as a catalyst for political violence on a mass scale', whilst Čolović focuses upon the violent nationalistic behaviour of Belgrade's football supporters and their subsequent paramilitary role in the Yugoslav wars.¹⁰ In particular, he states that during this period supporters' folklore became 'dominated by the theme of ethnic identity, until then sporadic and proscribed'.¹¹ However, whilst these studies are invaluable in terms of aiding our understanding of ethnically and politically motivated football violence, they are largely limited to developments surrounding Yugoslavia's 'big four' football clubs. Geographically this reduces the scope of their findings to the three cities of Belgrade, Zagreb and Split. Hence, whilst other regions were admittedly beyond the scope of this body of work, intriguing developments in politics such as Vojvodina are completely absent from this research.

One event in particular receives disproportionate attention from academics, commentators, supporters and the global media. The Maksimir stadium riot of May 1990 between Croatian supporters of Dinamo Zagreb and Serbian followers of Red Star Belgrade has achieved mythical status and is seen by many as the symbolic opening battle of the Yugoslav Civil War.¹² In Zagreb, the "Bad Blue Boys" even built a monument which honours the Dinamo supporters 'who started the war on 13 May 1990 at the Maksimir Stadium'.¹³ The politically motivated rioting – which played out to a soundtrack of ethnic and political chanting, left as many as 141 people injured

⁹ Čolović, I. *Politics of Identity in Serbia: Essays in Political Anthropology* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), pp.259–286; Perasović, B. *Urbana Plemena: Sociologija subkultura u Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 2001), pp.278–292; Vrcan, S. & D. Lalić, "From Ends to Trenches, and Back: Football in the Former Yugoslavia", in Armstrong, G. & R. Giulianotti, (eds.) *Football Cultures and Identities* (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp.176–185.

¹⁰ Vrcan & Lalić, "From Ends to Trenches", p.177; Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, pp.259–286.

¹¹ Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, p.272.

¹² Sack, A.L. & Z. Suster, (2000) "Soccer and Croatian Nationalism: A Prelude to War", *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 24:3, pp.310–313; Silber, L. & A. Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia* (London: Penguin, 1996), p.90; Goldstein, I. *Croatia: A History* (London: Hurst, 1999), p.216; For recent coverage of the 20th anniversary of the riot see: Židak, T. (2010) "Bolan i BBB obranili Maksimir od Arkanovih Delija", *Jutarnji List*, Zagreb, 13 May.

¹³ Monument inscription, Maksimir Stadium, Zagreb, Croatia. For a photograph of this monument see: Mills, R. (2009) "It All Ended in an Unsporting Way": Serbian Football and the Disintegration of Yugoslavia, 1989–2006", *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 26:9, p.1201

and resulted in serious damage to Dinamo's stadium and the surrounding area¹⁴ – has been assigned significant historical weight because it occurred only two weeks after the nationalist HDZ [*Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica*, Croatian Democratic Union] came to power in Croatia's first democratic elections, and because Red Star's "Delije" supporters' group were known to be ardent believers in the ethnically inspired politics of Slobodan Milošević. Leading political commentators have described how live television coverage of the 'chaos and destruction sent waves of fear throughout Yugoslavia' during a turbulent period of political instability and uncertainty.¹⁵ However, Maksimir was just one of many such events which occurred during this period and this essay will seek to demonstrate that whilst it may have been the largest occurrence of its kind, it certainly was not without precedent.

The fact that the Maksimir riot was also seen as a significant development at the time, with far reaching implications beyond the field of sport, is proved by the extensive media response. In the ensuing days and weeks Yugoslav newspapers and periodicals produced dozens of alarming articles, features and whole sections dedicated to Maksimir, with *Sportski Žurnal* even referring to the match as 'Maksimir's Croat-Serbian War'.¹⁶ This media coverage was, as Allen Sack and Zeljan Suster have demonstrated, largely divided along ethnic lines and made numerous accusations against the participants of the opposing ethnicity with regards to who was responsible for triggering the violence.¹⁷ As will become apparent, media coverage of football disorder and the phenomenon of media bias have considerable relevance to this essay, and will thus be considered in more detail here.

Čolović's groundbreaking chapter "Football, Hooligans and War" highlights the prevalence of media bias in Yugoslavia's sporting press of the late 1980s and early 1990s.¹⁸ He states that whilst the explosion of nationalistic hatred and aggression among supporters was universally condemned by the sporting press, on closer inspection it becomes apparent that

¹⁴ (1990) "Yugoslav Football League Derby – Unprecedented Violence", *Politika: The International Weekly*, Belgrade, 19–25 May.

¹⁵ Silber & Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, p.90.

¹⁶ Kos, M. (1990) "Лига рибарника", *Чопишка Жупан*, Belgrade, 17 May; For multiple page reports on the Maksimir Riot see: Marković, B. (1990) "U Zagrebu, na neodigranom derbiju Dinamo – Crvena Zvezda – Maksimir sa Ukusom Vatre i Krvi", *Tempo*, Belgrade, 16 May & Tironi, D. (1990) "Maksimirski krug Pakla – mislija", *Sport Magazin*, Zagreb, 16 May. For more detail on the Yugoslav media coverage of Maksimir see: Nielsen, C. A. (2010) "The goalposts of transition: football as a metaphor for Serbia's long journey to the rule of law", *Nationalities Papers*, 38:1, pp.89–90.

¹⁷ Sack & Suster, "Soccer and Croatian Nationalism", pp.310–313.

¹⁸ Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, pp.259–286.

the media were acting in a partisan manner and that according to Serbia's media the primary sources of such evil behaviour and hatred were 'supporters outside of Serbia', with Dinamo and Hajduk fans from Croatia depicted as 'especially wild, bestial' and 'inhuman' by the Belgrade press.¹⁹ By the turn of the decade, Milošević had successfully created a 'pliant press' and Serbia's media were exclusively blaming such excesses upon the nationalist leaderships of other federal units, such as the HDZ, whilst similarly responsible Serbian politicians were largely excused from blame.²⁰ John Lampe notes that after 1989 Zagreb's media became an equally effective vehicle for the dissemination of ethnic politics, a development which was duly reflected by anti-Serb bias in Croatia's sporting press.²¹ Sabrina Ramet concludes that through its hysterical sectarian behaviour, Yugoslavia's multifaceted media 'contributed to both the breakup of the SFRY [Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia] and the outbreak of interethnic warfare.'²² In many respects the way in which Yugoslavia's media was structured always made it vulnerable to such political interference and partisan behaviour. This is because each of the federal units had its own separate media outlets, whilst Ramet has revealed that 'there was a close correlation between republic of residence and preferences for newspapers and periodicals' across the former Yugoslavia.²³ 1990s sales figures demonstrate this complex marketplace, showing that seven of the eight federal units were represented by their own publications among the 27 daily newspapers with circulations larger than 10,000 copies in Yugoslavia.²⁴ That such complexity was replicated in the sporting press is partially demonstrated by the presence of three sports publications on the above mentioned list – Zagreb's *Sportske Novosti* and Belgrade's *Sport* and *Sportski Žurnal*. Alongside these daily publications, the sporting press also included a number of weekly periodicals, pre-

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.261–262; Nielsen, "The goalposts of transition", p.89

²⁰ Ramet, S. P. *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, 1962–1991* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp.227–228; Colović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, pp.262–264

²¹ Lampe, J.R. *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There was a Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.342; for pro-Croatian media bias concerning sporting events see; Sack & Suster, "Soccer and Croatian Nationalism", pp.305–320

²² Ramet, S. P. *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia From the Death of Tito to the Fall of Milošević* (Boulder, CO & Oxford, Westview, 2002), p.41; For more on the political manipulation of the Yugoslav media and its role in precipitating the conflict see: Thompson, M. *Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1999)

²³ Ramet, *Balkan Babel*, pp.40–41

²⁴ Ibid., p.42. For the purposes of this essay, it is useful to note that Vojvodina's bestselling newspaper in 1990 was Novi Sad's *Dnevnik* with 39,677 copies. There are no publications from Kosovo in this list.

eminent among which were Belgrade's *Tempo* and Zagreb's *Sprint*, with the latter being renamed *Sport Magazin* in May 1990.

Aware of this politically charged atmosphere and the interrepublican complexity which characterised the Yugoslav press of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the findings of this essay will be based upon careful analysis of a variety of contemporary newspapers and periodicals from the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Serbia and Croatia. Of particular interest are a number of letters written by football supporters and published in dedicated readers' letters sections of *Tempo* and *Sprint*. Whilst it must be noted that these letters will have undergone both a selection process and editing, they nevertheless provide an otherwise unobtainable source of contemporary opinion which can be usefully contrasted against the reports of professional journalists. These media sources will be used in conjunction with an interview with members of the "Red Firm" supporters' group and available secondary literature.

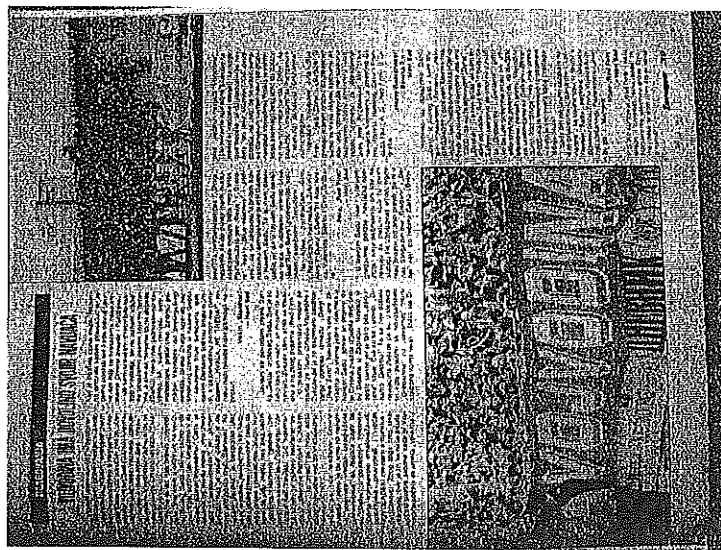


FIGURE 2: A page of *Tempo*'s "Tribina Navijača" dedicated to letters and photographs from Vojvodina supporters, 31st January 1990.

Vojvodina's Yogurt Revolution and the emergence of "Red Firm"

By the beginning of October 1988 FK Vojvodina was already amongst the leading clubs of the First Federal League, having won all of its home games, including a notable victory against Hajduk Split. However, off the pitch SAP Vojvodina and its capital Novi Sad were being rocked by enormous political upheaval. Since the Yugoslav Federal constitution of 1974 both Vojvodina and Kosovo had enjoyed significant levels of autonomy from the Socialist Republic of Serbia, of which they formed constituent – though not subordinate – parts. In fact, the constitution effectively gave these provinces the same rights as Yugoslavia's six constituent republics, with the right to administer their own affairs, equal representation at the federal level and the right to veto legislation in the federal parliament. All of this was fulfilled by the provinces' own institutions – parliaments, executive councils, presidencies and supreme courts – without interference from Serbia.²⁵ Ramet notes that as a result the provinces became 'republics in everything but name', whilst Serbia found it increasingly difficult to exert any kind of influence upon them.²⁶ However, the Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution, which was carried out under the guidance of Slobodan Milošević between July 1988 and March 1989, effectively abolished this provincial autonomy, returning power to Belgrade and ensuring that the Socialist Republic of Serbia was centrally administered.²⁷

In Vojvodina, a series of 32 protest rallies took place between July and October 1988. These were ostensibly organised as protests against the perceived persecution of Serbs living in Kosovo – with delegations of Kosovo Serbs leading the rallies – but they transpired to be a carefully orchestrated plan designed to bring down Vojvodina's autonomous government.²⁸ This season of rallies culminated in a massive demonstration in front of the Vojvodina Party Headquarters in Novi Sad on the 5th of October. The demonstrators hurled cartoons of yogurt and stones at the building, thus christening these tumultuous events as the "Yogurt Revolution". Chanting for the resignation of the autonomous leadership, the crowd of up to 100,000 people aired their grievances by shouting slogans such as: "Vojvodina is

²⁵ Kerenji, E. "Vojvodina Since 1988", in: Ramet, S. P. & V. Pavlaković (eds.), *Serbia Since 1989: Politics and Society Under Milošević and After* (Seattle & London: University of Washington, 2005), p.365

²⁶ Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia*, p.77

²⁷ For a detailed explanation of the Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution see: Silber & Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, pp.58–69

²⁸ Kerenji, "Vojvodina Since 1988", pp.351–354

Serbia", "Kosovo is Serbia" and "Down with the 1974 constitution".²⁹ Alongside these political statements, elements of the crowd also descended into nationalistic intolerance, screaming "Death to Albanians" and "All Albanians are guilty", whilst denouncing the "separatist" Azem Vllasi – one of the leaders of the Kosovar Albanians – and chanting "We will kill Azem", "We will kill Vllasi".³⁰ Having failed in their attempts to call in the army and under pressure from Milošević, the Vojvodina party leadership were unable to take control of the situation and in the early hours of the following day they resigned their positions. This enabled Milošević to cleanse the Vojvodina party structure of "autonomists" and install his own supporters.³¹ A similar process also took place in Kosovo and, with the promulgation of Serbia's 1990 constitution, the autonomy of these two provinces was practically abolished. These amendments drastically upset the balance-of-power in the Yugoslav Federation, giving Serbia – along with a loyal Montenegro – four of the eight votes at the Federal level, leading the politicians of Yugoslavia's other republics to conclude that the abolition of these provincial autonomies effectively meant the end of Yugoslavia.³²

In the aftermath of the Yogurt Revolution the previous autonomous regime was widely denounced and up to 40,000 people – politicians, police chiefs, managers of state-owned companies, media editors, etc. – were purged from their positions across Vojvodina and replaced by Milošević loyalists.³³ Nor was FK Vojvodina left unaffected by this political changing of the guard. In a July 1990 interview with *Tempo*, the new club director Cvetko Riđošić denounced the previous regime, stating that 'I must say that alongside the fact that the former autonomous politics destroyed everything in Vojvodina, it was also destroying FK Vojvodina.' Having castigated 'the former power-holders' for high levels of corruption, he noted that 'with the fall of autonomous politics the people for whom personal interests were above those of the club have finally been eliminated.'³⁴ Three months earlier *Tempo* had uncovered an alleged scandal, denouncing the corruption and criminal activity of "autonomists" who had previously (mis)managed

²⁹ Silber & Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, pp.58–60

³⁰ Kerenji, "Vojvodina Since 1988", p.354, reference 17

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.355; Ramet, *Balkan Babel*, p.30

³² Silber & Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, p.63; Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia*, p.18

³³ Kerenji, "Vojvodina Since 1988", p.355

³⁴ Riđošić, C. cited in; Cvijetić, B. (1990) "Mihajlović vredi tri miliona maraka", *Tempo*, Belgrade, 11 July.

FK Vojvodina.³⁵ Of course, one wonders to what extent Milošević's "pliant press" exaggerated these stories for propaganda purposes.

In the midst of this enormous political upheaval FK Vojvodina was enjoying one of the most successful seasons in its long history. On the terraces a group of zealous youths, swept along by the euphoria surrounding their club, formed the "Red Firm" supporters' group in the spring of 1989. Fan subculture was flourishing all over Yugoslavia in this period, with many of the principal supporters' groups founded in the late 1980s. These groups were heavily influenced by developments elsewhere in Europe and by Britain's hooligan subculture in particular. Many of the emerging groups gave themselves English names and the Union Jack was displayed in stadiums across the country.³⁶ In this respect "Red Firm" was no exception, as founding members of the group recall:

We had a meeting and talked about the name of the group, and we wanted to give it a hard name – like the West Ham supporters – ICF, the Inter City Firm. There was a vote ... and people wanted to name the group like that – so the Firm was a good name at that time. We wanted to be different from them, so we gave our group the name "Red Firm", because of the red colour of our shirts.³⁷

A contemporary letter to *Tempo* explains that whilst the newly established "Red Firm" was still relatively small, with around 500 "genuine" supporters, 'the number of flags, banners and drums is slowly increasing'.³⁸ A Photograph from the victorious 1988–89 season clearly shows these fans with their distinctive red, white and orange "Red Firm" banner, featuring the crossed hammers which were borrowed from the "Inter City Firm" crest.³⁹

This group also had a clearly defined political stance. In open opposition to the overt Serbian nationalism of Red Star Belgrade's "Delije" supporters' group and the Croat nationalism of Dinamo Zagreb's "Bad Blue Boys", "Red Firm" declared themselves 'Yugoslav orientated supporters' from the outset.⁴⁰ This policy was also adopted by groups in multiethnic

³⁵ Marinović, N. J. (1990) "Trofaji ministarske pljačke", *Tempo*, Belgrade, 11 April.

³⁶ Perasović, *Urbana Plemena*, pp.284–285; Spaaij, R. (2007) "Football hooliganism as a transnational phenomenon: Past and present analysis: A critique – More specificity and less generality", *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 24:4, pp.411–431

³⁷ Ognjen, Miroslav and Nebojša – Red Firm, FK Vojvodina Supporters' Group, Novi Sad, Serbia, 8 November 2007.

³⁸ Deja, "Red Firm" Novi Sad, "Novi Sad se budi", *Tempo*

³⁹ Todorović & Gavrilović, *Ocauđecem srpsno-benux godina*, p.110

⁴⁰ "Red Crew" – Novi Sad, "I mi smo Jugoslovenski orijentisani", in: Marković, R. (ed.) (1989) "Tribina Navijača", *Tempo*, Belgrade, 1 November.

Bosnia and Hercegovina during this period, and such a stance should not come as a surprise when one considers the ethnic diversity of Vojvodina Province. The 1991 census shows that the two million inhabitants of the province consisted of 56.8% Serbs, 16.9% Hungarians, 8.7% "Yugoslavs", 3.7% Croats, and so on.⁴¹ Founding members of "Red Firm" recall that "we were not nationalists, because there were members of other nationalities in our group. Everybody was Vojvodinian."⁴² In order to prove the pro-Yugoslav credentials of "Red Firm", one member of the subsidiary group "Red Crew" wrote to *Tempo*, explaining that during a recent match against Red Star, the "Delije" had chanted 'Serbia, Serbia!', to which "Red Firm" stalwartly replied 'Yugoslavia, Yugoslavia!' He also notes that "Red Firm" sang the Yugoslav national anthem in a European Cup game against the Hungarian club Honved.⁴³

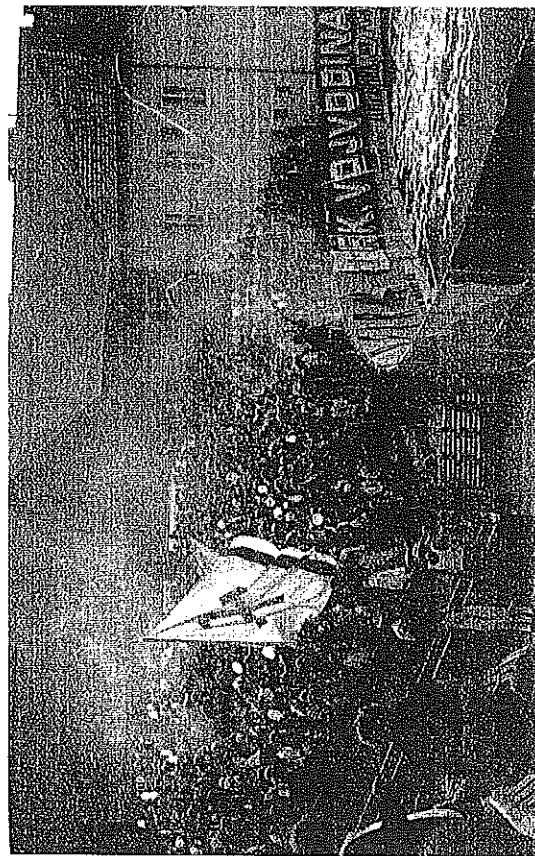


FIGURE 3: "Red Firm" in action in Novi Sad during FK Vojvodina's European Cup match against Honved in 1989⁴⁴

⁴¹ Kerenji, "Vojvodina Since 1988", pp.355–356

⁴² (2009) "Intervju – Juče, Danas, Sutra... Zauvek!", *Fanzin Navijačke Grupe FIRMA 1989 „Huk sa severa“*, Novi Sad, March, p.18

⁴³ "Red Crew" – Novi Sad, "I mi smo Jugoslovenski orijentisani", *Tempo*

⁴⁴ Photo used with the permission of Miroslav, Red Firm, FK Vojvodina Supporters' Group, Novi Sad, Serbia, 8 November 2007.

This stance is verified by the presence of numerous Yugoslav flags in photographs of the group from this time.⁴⁵ Indeed, in the weeks following FK Vojvodina's title winning success "Red Firm" were even accused of betraying Serbia by local supporters of Red Star and Partizan. This occurred when Vojvodina fans jubilantly chanted "Dinamo, Dinamo!" having received news that the Croatian club had beaten Red Star, securing the championship for FK Vojvodina in the process.⁴⁶ Such a stance came in for much criticism from other Serbian supporters' groups, whilst *Tempo* exacerbated the situation by printing a provocative letter from a "Delije" member which ridiculed the 'very small number' of Vojvodina supporters who attend matches.⁴⁷ By the winter of 1989 many members of "Red Firm" had had enough, feeling that there was a need to demonstrate the credentials of their group. The stage was set for FK Vojvodina's opening match of 1990 against Dinamo Zagreb.

During this time, the political situation continued to deteriorate in Yugoslavia, for whilst Vojvodina Province had endured its own political upheavals during the course of the 1988–89 football season, in the following year the Yugoslav Federation itself began to unravel. In January 1990 the League of Communists of Yugoslavia fell apart when the Slovene delegation walked out of the 14th Extraordinary Party Congress and set the country on a path to dissolution in the process.⁴⁸ Politics now moved into the centre of attention across Yugoslavia. Less than one month later politics and nationalism were to impinge upon FK Vojvodina itself, as the explosion of nationalist sentiment made a conspicuous arrival at its Novi Sad stadium.

Politics on the Offensive – FK Vojvodina v Dinamo Zagreb

FK Vojvodina's highly anticipated match against Dinamo took place on Sunday the 18th of February 1990. The game, which saw the current league leaders take on the previous season's champions, aroused great attention among Yugoslavia's football following public. Off the pitch, officials implemented extraordinary security measures for the visit of Croatia's

⁴⁵ Todorović & Gavrilović, *Osnovni elementi srpsko-belijske godine*, p.110; (2008) "Retro Galerija", *Fanzin Navijačke Grupe FIRMA 1989*, "Huk sa severa", Novi Sad, March, pp.126–130

⁴⁶ Pera, "Red Firm" – Novi Sad, "Reagovanja – Vojvodina ima dovoljno svojih navijača", in: Marković, R. (ed.) (1990) "Tribina Navijača", *Tempo*, Belgrade, 31 January.

⁴⁷ Darko "Delija" – Novi Sad, "I mi volimo Vojvodinu", in: Marković, R. (ed.) (1990) "Tribina Navijača", *Tempo*, Belgrade, 10 January.

⁴⁸ Silber & Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, pp.246–247

leading team, whilst the Yugoslav Football Association unsurprisingly categorised the encounter as "high risk".⁴⁹ A foreboding pre-match report in *Dnevnik* informed its readership that the "Bad Blue Boys" were expected in Novi Sad in large numbers, and whilst Vojvodina's stadium director told the *Dnevnik* reporter that Vojvodina's supporters 'have never been a problem' in the past, the newspaper nevertheless predicted that 'a little war will undoubtedly rage on the terraces.' The reason for such a pessimistic stance was that Red Star and Partizan supporters had also announced their intentions to unite with "Red Firm" in their contest against the visiting "Bad Blue Boys".⁵⁰ In fact, the possibility for such a coalition of Serbian supporters had been raised by "Red Firm" members in *Tempo* a few weeks prior to the big match. Four separate letters which were all printed in the same issue explained how "Red Firm" planned to prove its strength, size and ability to create an atmosphere during the forthcoming encounter against Dinamo.⁵¹ Supporters of Red Star, Partizan, Spartak Subotica and Proleter Zrenjanin were all invited to come and assist the Novi Sad group, as the following extract from a letter written by Pera "Red Firm" demonstrates:

...I invite all "Delije" and "Grobari", as well as "Blue Marines" and "Indians", to gather together with us for the first round of the spring championship against Dinamo in Novi Sad. We would welcome this because there is widespread talk in Novi Sad about the arrival of a large number of "Bad Blue Boys", assisted by Split and Osijek "Torcida".⁵²

These letters thus indicate that many supporters from Serbia and Croatia were planning a hostile showdown in Novi Sad. Extra police were drafted in, segregation fences at the stadium were reinforced and the stage was set for what was to follow.

The early morning tranquility which usually characterises Novi Sad's streets every Sunday was shattered by the arrival of the 6am train from Zagreb. The 400 strong contingent of "Bad Blue Boys" began to make their mark upon the city almost immediately, as local police moved to arrest two

⁴⁹ Kovač, G. (1990) "Navijači prva Briga", *Dnevnik*, Novi Sad, 17 February.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Vošin "Slaninar", Pera "Red Firm", "Heavy Beertinker" & Vođe "Red Firm" – Novi Sad, "Reagovanja – Vojvodina ima dovoljno svojih navijača", in: Marković, R. (ed.) (1990) "Tribina Navijača", *Tempo*, Belgrade, 31 January.

⁵² Pera "Red Firm" – Novi Sad, "Reagovanja – Vojvodina ima dovoljno svojih navijača", *Tempo*. "Blue Marines" are supporters of Spartak "Indians" of Proleter, whilst the supporters' groups of both Hajduk Split and NK Osijek were called "Torcida" at this time.

juveniles from Zagreb after the window panes of two kiosks were smashed on the 23rd of October Boulevard which leads into the centre of Vojvodina's capital. Shortly after this members of the "Bad Blues Boys" also shattered the window of a grocery on Maxim Gorky Street, before the group finally arrived on the central square.⁵³ At this point the Croat group entered Novi Sad's Catholic Cathedral and allegedly partook in "mass", before taking to the streets once again to indulge in a series of nationalist chants and slogans.

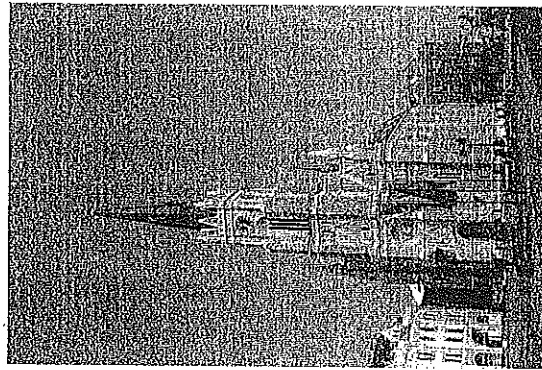


Figure 4: Novi Sad's Catholic Cathedral, where the Croat "BBB" attended "mass" and indulged in nationalist chanting on the morning of the game.

In scenes reminiscent of the previous winter's Yögurt Revolution, the "Bad Blue Boys" inverted some of the aforementioned Serbian nationalist slogans and goaded the local inhabitants by shouting "Kosovo is a Republic" and "Azem Vllasi", as well as "This is Croatia" and various insults aimed at Serbian President Slobodan Milošević.⁵⁴ In a subsequent letter to *Sprint*, a "Bad Blue Boys" member who was present on the square on that morning claimed that his group had been 'irritated' and provoked into singing their nationalist 'repertoire' by a middle-aged lady who had alleg-

⁵³ M. U. (1990) „Оутрећена три излора”, *Дневник*, Novi Sad, 19 February.

⁵⁴ Ibid.; Tironi, D. (1990) „Pigomani” u uniformi”, *Sprint*, Zagreb, 21 February; Bakmaz, L. (1990) „Исти третман према свима”, *Дневник*, Novi Sad, 22 February.

edly called them 'Ustaše' and spat at them from the top of a nearby building.⁵⁵ Whilst these incidents set the tone for the rest of the day, according to "Red Firm" members politically motivated trouble had actually begun the night before with fighting between Serbs and members of the sizeable local Croat minority in nearby Petrovaradin.⁵⁶ What is certain is that on the morning of the game the atmosphere on the streets of Novi Sad was incredibly tense and kick-off was still several hours away.

Shortly before 2pm and with 15,000 spectators crowded into the Vojvodina stadium, a "Bad Blue Boys" youth scaled the perimeter fence and ran onto the pitch brandishing an upside down Yugoslav flag without the socialist *petokraka* (five-pointed star). Of course, when a Yugoslav tricolour is deliberately inverted in such a manner it actually resembles the Croatian flag, and as a result of this nationalist affront the youth received a beating from the local police.⁵⁷ During the opening exchanges of the match, the Serbian and Croatian supporters traded verbal insults and competed against one another with nationalist slogans. From the east terrace, where "Red Firm" were located, chants of 'I love Serbia' and 'I hate Dinamo' could be heard, whilst the "Bad Blue Boys" replied with 'Arise Ban Jelačić' and 'I love Dinamo' from their position behind the goal on the north terrace.⁵⁸ However, the encounter only really exploded into life when FK Vojvodina took the lead in the 36th minute.

As the ecstatic Vojvodina footballers rushed over to celebrate in front of "Red Firm", firecrackers and smoke bombs began to fill the air. A television commentator noted that 'Novi Sad has never experienced so many pyrotechnics before', and a smokescreen soon obscured the pitch from view.⁵⁹ *Dnevnik* reported that the smoke and noise which greeted the goal made it feel 'as if it were a war' inside the stadium, and the game was immediately halted by the referee Dragiša Komadinić.⁶⁰ In his post match report

⁵⁵ Marić, Slavenska Požega, „За pjesme kriva sredovječna gospoda”, in: (1990) „navijači... reagiranja... polemike... mišljenja... suprostavljanja...”, *Sprint*, Zagreb, 7 March.

⁵⁶ Ognjen, Miroslav and Nebojša – Red Firm, FK Vojvodina Supporters' Group, Novi Sad, Serbia, 8 November 2007.

⁵⁷ Ibid.; Nikola „P.F.C.” – Novi Sad, „Odgovor 'Redfirmovcu'”, in: Marković, R. (ed.) (1990) „Trubina Navijača”, *Tempo*, Belgrade, 11 April; For a contrasting view of this event, which claims that the "BBB" were initially provoked by a youth with a Serbian flag, see: Marić, Slavenska Požega, „За pjesme kriva sredovječna gospoda”, *Sprint*

⁵⁸ Živan Vidaković – Gibarac, „Nikad više na stadion”, in: Marković, R. (ed.) (1990) „Trubina Navijača”, *Tempo*, Belgrade, 28 March. Interestingly, a version of this letter was also published in *Sprint*: Živan Vidaković – Gibarac, „Laži”, in: (1990) „navijači... polemike... mišljenja... suprostavljanja...”, *Sprint*, Zagreb, 7 March.

⁵⁹ Tironi, „Pigomani” u uniformi”, *Sprint*

⁶⁰ Predojević, A. (1990) „Камера на стадиону Војводине”, *Дневник*, Novi Sad, 20 February.

Komadinić wrote that during the extravagant goal celebration 'four or five smoke bombs fell on the pitch and around fifteen onto the athletics track, so I judged that the safety of the match participants was endangered.'⁶¹ Having consulted with the head of the police detachment, the referee delayed the match for ten minutes whilst policemen used force to clear the section of the east terrace where "Red Firm" were based. A photograph in *Dnevnik* captures the resultant scene perfectly. Huddles of engrossed players on the pitch can be seen looking over towards a completely empty stretch of the east terrace, the extent of which is clearly delineated by a twenty metre long red and white "Red Firm Novi Sad" banner draped over the advertising hoardings at the front of the stand.⁶² Nevertheless, these supporters were eventually allowed to return to their places.⁶³

The magnitude of "Red Firm's" celebration also elicited a response from the visiting supporters, who – not wanting to be outgunned by their Novi Sad opponents – began to create their own smoke screen in Dinamo's distinctive blue colours during the enforced interruption to the match.⁶⁴ As a result, the police also moved in to calm the "Bad Blue Boys" and chaos reigned inside the stadium for several minutes. Outraged at the allegedly brutal police intervention against these Croat supporters, both the coaching staff and players of Dinamo rushed over towards the north terrace in an attempt to protect their own fans. In what would turn out to be the most controversial event of the day, the police could be seen using batons against young Dinamo supporters, whilst Dinamo players Zvonimir Boban and Kutim Šalja scaled the perimeter fence and hurled nationalist abuse at the entrenched policemen.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Kovač, G. (1990) „Угрожена безбедност актера утакмице“, *Дневник*, Novi Sad, 20 February.

⁶² Predojević, „Камера на стадиону Војводине“, *Дневник*

⁶³ Kovač, G. (1990) „Ладно оверко бод затрпчана“, *Дневник*, Novi Sad, 19 February.

⁶⁴ Tironi, „Pronamni i uniformi“, *Sprint*

⁶⁵ Ibid.; „Камера на стадиону Војводине“, *Дневник*; Вакмаз, „Исти третман према свима“, *Дневник*; Živan Vidaković – Gibarac, „Nikad više na stadion“, *Темпо*

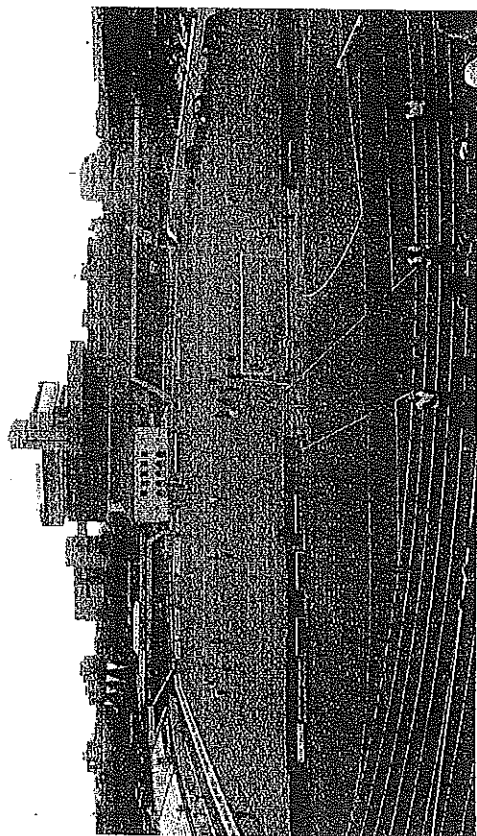


Figure 5: Novi Sad's Vojvodina Stadium, looking out from the north terrace where the "BBB" were accommodated. "Red Firm" and the other Serbian supporters were located on the east terrace, to the left of the photo.

After these ten minutes of madness the game resumed and there were no further incidents on the terraces. The match ended in a penalty shootout victory for Dinamo and afterwards a large police detachment escorted the "Bad Blue Boys" on foot to the train station.⁶⁶ Whilst the newspapers report that there were no incidents on the return to the station, "Red Firm" members are adamant that they attacked the Croat fans many times and that 'Vojvodina supporters took two banners from them and stoned their train.' They also note that a number of people were hurt on both sides.⁶⁷ A history of the group records that "Red Firm" did indeed steal two banners – those of "BBB Slavovski Brod" and "BBB Slavovska Požega".⁶⁸ A far more serious act of vandalism was reported in a number of contemporary articles. This incident saw Vojvodina supporters smash the windscreen of a coach

⁶⁶ M. U. „Omrčeena tri izlora“, *Дневник*

⁶⁷ Ogrjen, Miroslav and Nebojša – Red Firm, FK Vojvodina Supporters' Group, Novi Sad, Serbia, 8 November 2007.

⁶⁸ „Istorija Firme“, Firma 1989 website, <http://www.firma1989.com/istorija-firme.html> (accessed 29/7/2010)

which had brought Dinamo fans to Novi Sad.⁶⁹ But, despite nearly twelve hours of aggression, vandalism and ethnic slurs – resulting in fifteen arrests⁷⁰ – the day ended as peacefully as it had begun. As soon as the “Bad Blue Boys” were aboard, their train pulled out of the station in the direction of Croatia and a tranquil peace fell over Novi Sad. However, the post-mortem into what had gone wrong on that brisk February day in Vojvodina would rage for weeks in the Yugoslav press.

Aftermath – Battle by Media

Monday morning’s *Dnevnik* relentlessly condemned the behaviour of both sets of supporters and in subsequent days numerous articles were published on the subject.⁷¹ The principal Vojvodina daily adopted the stance that whilst such disgraceful behaviour was to be expected from the ‘infamous’ “Bad Blue Boys”, the most disappointing aspect was that FK Vojvodina’s own supporters also ‘failed the test’.⁷² *Dnevnik* Journalist Gabor Kovač reticently noted that whilst ‘for a long time Vojvodina was proud of its supporters, claiming to have the best public in the country’, “Red Firm” had now ‘turned their backs on their club’:

They failed them when they were perhaps needed the most. Simply, they went along with a handful of Dinamo supporters and after the leading goal of “their” team they reacted like barbarians. Obviously for them it was not important whether their club would win, but rather how they could demonstrate their strength to the “Bad Blue Boys” ... They resembled an unbridled mass for whom the sole aim was to create disorder.⁷³

This opinion is typical of the *Dnevnik* coverage of the match. Thus, whilst the newspaper was willing to condemn the local supporters, it did so by concluding that they were ‘provoked’ by the Croat “Bad Blue Boys”, going ‘along with a handful of Dinamo supporters’. The willingness for Yugoslavia’s republic centred press to lessen the magnitude of acts committed by members of their own nation, whilst concurrently accentuating

⁶⁹ M. U. „Оштрећена три излога”, *Дневник*, Титоград, „Риомани” и униформи”, *Sprint*

⁷⁰ Bakmaz, „Исти третман према свима”, *Дневник*

⁷¹ (1990) „Динамо бод у Новом Саду”, *Дневник*, Novi Sad, 19 February; Kovač, „Лалић оверло бод зарепаца”, *Дневник*; M. U. „Оштрећена три излога”, *Дневник*

⁷² Kovač, G. (1990) „Навијачи пали на испиту”, *Дневник*, Novi Sad, 20 February.

⁷³ Ibid.

the misdeeds of groups from other republics has been demonstrated by Čolović’s previous study, as noted above. This helps to explain why *Dnevnik* held a handful of Croat fans fully responsible for lighting the fuse.

Thus, without excusing the “Bad Blue Boys” for their role in the day’s events, it is perhaps more useful to look a little closer to home for the origins of “Red Firm’s” ‘barbarian’ behaviour. As previously mentioned, members of “Red Firm” wrote letters to *Tempo* during the build-up to the match which specifically stated both their desire to prove their strength and ability to create an atmosphere, and an open invitation for assistance from other Serbian supporters’ groups. Indeed, when the president of Vojvodina supporters was questioned about the poor conduct of his peers following the Dinamo match, he offered a far more plausible reason for “Red Firm’s” degeneration into ethnically motivated behaviour:

The Vojvodina supporters were not guilty for that. You saw that we were not alone; followers of Partizan and Red Star joined us, while Proleter’s Indians and the Blue Marines (Spartak supporters) also sneaked among us. We did not manage to pull the strings. We tried to chant “Voša, Voša...” but it did not spread ... many only came to cause disorder.⁷⁴

A subsequent letter printed in *Tempo* protested that supporters should be allowed to sing about their love for Serbia and then went on to thank ‘our friends from Belgrade, Zrenjanin and Subotica ... for their help, with the wish that our cooperation will continue.’⁷⁵ Thus, although the “Bad Blue Boys” were known troublemakers with strong nationalist views, it is apparent that a coalition of Serbian groups gathered in Novi Sad in order to confront their Croat adversaries.

Several letters in Belgrade and Zagreb publications condemned the events surrounding ‘the match in Novi Sad at which nationalism excelled.’⁷⁶ For example, *Tempo* reader Dragan Todorović castigated both the Serbian nationalism of Vojvodina’s supporters – who he notes ironically ‘identify themselves as “Yugoslavs”’ – and the Croat chants of the “BBB”, who ‘clashed with the police for the umpteenth time.’⁷⁷ Similarly, Dinamo supporter and *Sprint* reader Dragan Živković berated his fellow fans for

⁷⁴ Kovač, G. (1990) „Порешили, али били изазвани”, *Дневник*, Novi Sad, 22 February.

⁷⁵ G.B.H. – Novi Sad, „Ко је прекршио договор?” in; Marković, R. (ed.) (1990) „Трибина Навијача”, *Tempo*, Belgrade, 7 March.

⁷⁶ Dragan Todorović – Belgrade, „Sport treba da zblizava”, in; Marković, R. (ed.) (1990) „Трибина Навијача”, *Tempo*, Belgrade, 7 March.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

'those disgraceful chants on the streets of Novi Sad', appealing to them to 'come to their senses, calm down and forget nationalism'.⁷⁸ However, whilst accepting that nationalist chanting took place in Novi Sad, a number of Zagreb's journalists put a very different spin on the day's events.

Accusing many commentators of 'making a mountain out of a molehill', *Sprint* magazine stated that everything in Novi Sad 'was strangely forced, fabricated from nothing'.⁷⁹ Developing this position the magazine's main article on the match condemned the incompetence of the match officials for delaying the game for too long after "Red Firm's" celebratory smoke screen had cleared.⁸⁰ But the greatest accusations are reserved for the police. Dubbing them 'pyromaniacs in uniform' *Sprint* blasts the police for their brutal intervention against the "Bad Blue Boys". The article utilises a quote from Dinamo's head coach Josip Kuže in order to explain what was responsible for the explosion of violence in the stadium:

The scandalous, disgraceful conduct of the police! They beat and attacked our supporters without a reason, without any kind of motive. I saw one policeman, who had been with us in the hotel – talking to us nicely before the match – and now he was cruelly pounding everyone who he could grab...⁸¹

Sprint goes on to note that the police also 'attacked' Vojvodina's supporters on the east terrace, 'again without an obvious reason'. Summoning recollections of recent football disasters such as Heysel and Hillsborough, the article blusters: 'Flight, a pressing mass, a stampede... It ended unbelievably, in such circumstances one can easily be killed'.⁸² Novi Sad's *Dnevnik* had a very different view of how these officers conducted themselves during the game, praising them and noting that 'thanks to the effective actions of the police, more severe incidents on the terraces were prevented'.⁸³ Ironically, in total contrast to the Zagreb magazine, *Dnevnik* also hinted at the potential for tragedy, but instead of blaming the police, it categorically stated that the supporters were to blame: 'It appears as though various tragic precedents are not sufficient warning to the kids when they

⁷⁸ Živković Dragan – Cico, Šabac, „Ima ljepših stvari od razjedinjavanja“, in: (1990) „navijači... reagiranja... polemike... mišljenja... suprostavljanja...“, *Sprint*, Zagreb, 4 April.

⁷⁹ Tironi, „'Piromani' u uniformi“, *Sprint*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Kuže, J. cited in; *Ibid.*

⁸² Tironi, „'Piromani' u uniformi“, *Sprint*. For a brief overview of the 1985 Heysel Stadium disaster see: Goldblatt, D, *The Ball is Round: A Global History of Football* (Penguin Viking, 2006), pp.543–545

⁸³ „Динамо бод у Новом Саду“, *Дневник*

leave for the stadium'.⁸⁴ This clash of opinions would reach full maturity during the aftermath of the aforementioned Maksimir riot which occurred just three months later. Following Maksimir, Croatian nationalist politicians and media organisations denounced the police for being pro-Serbian and allegedly utilised the opportunity to purge Serb officers from the force.⁸⁵

Numerous readers' letters also denounced the police for their over zealous approach and particularly for the use of batons against unarmed teenagers. "Bad Blue Boys" member Marić was outraged that the Novi Sad public chanted "Serbia, Serbia" as 'the police tested their truncheons on our backs',⁸⁶ whilst an older Dinamo supporter condemned the law enforcers who 'mercilessly used truncheons, beating even children around fifteen years old without any genuine reason'.⁸⁷ Vojvodina supporters were also keen to stress that the police had overreacted against both "Red Firm" and the "Bad Blue Boys". Dean Terzić from Novi Sad stated that:

I would like to most energetically condemn the conduct of the police who so barbarically attacked our children, without any genuine reason. Tears came to my eyes whilst watching that horrible sight. I ask myself, do these same policemen have anything decent or humane within themselves; do they have children at all?⁸⁸

Another Vojvodina supporter blamed the disturbance upon 'the behaviour of our Novi Sad police department', bitterly explaining how sad it was 'to watch how the Novi Sad policemen "re-educated" us while, at the time, there were elderly people, girls and a large number of extremely young children on the terraces'.⁸⁹ A Dinamo fan, resident in Vojvodina, stated that he would never take his son to a match again, concluding: 'Whilst not defending the uncultured savagery among the supporters, I wonder whether anyone will ever consider the conduct of policemen in stadiums, and not only in Novi Sad but also elsewhere?'.⁹⁰

Despite such a broad range of condemnation, Novi Sad's *Dnevnik* continued to firmly back the police position, choosing instead to present Dinamo's management and players as the principal villains of the piece.

⁸⁴ Predojević, „Камера на стадиону Војводине“, *Дневник*

⁸⁵ Sack & Suster, „Soccer and Croatian Nationalism“, p.312

⁸⁶ Marić, Slavenska Požega, „За pjesme kriva sredovječna gospoda“, *Sprint*

⁸⁷ Živan Vidaković – Gibarac, „Laži“, *Sprint*

⁸⁸ Dean Terzić – Novi Sad, „Jedna dimna nije razlog“, in: (1990) „navijači... reagiranja... polemike... mišljenja... suprostavljanja...“, *Sprint*, Zagreb, 7 March.

⁸⁹ G.B.H – Novi Sad, „Ko je prekršio dogovor?“, *Tempo*

⁹⁰ Živan Vidaković – Gibarac, „Laži“, *Sprint*; Živan Vidaković – Gibarac, „Nikad više na stadion“, *Tempo*

The newspaper interviewed Dragutin Adamović, the head of the Novi Sad police administration, giving him the chance to justify the police's tough reaction.⁹¹ The article begins by explaining that Dinamo's executive board had reprimanded the police for 'not applying the same standards towards Dinamo's supporters in comparison with the other spectators', particularly with regards to the 'unnecessary usage of truncheons'. In response, Adamović stated that a truncheon had only been used once and that every act of his policemen had been directed against specific misbehaving individuals. Satisfied with this response the *Dnevnik* reporter allowed Adamović to conclude the interview with his own thoughts on the matter: 'I would like to add the very incorrect behaviour of the Dinamo players, led by their manager Kuže against members of the police. They insulted them, swore "mother Serbia" at them, gesticulated...⁹² These comments, referring to the moment when Dinamo's employees ran to the aid of the "Bad Blue Boys" on the north terrace, chimed harmoniously with *Dnevnik's* own coverage of the match. On this incident, the newspaper had previously stated that the Dinamo players 'took advantage of the situation in order to verbally settle accounts with the police'.⁹³ A different article ridiculed Dinamo's players, noting that 'Internationals Davor Šuker and Zvonimir Boban excelled, but the loudest was Kujtim Salja ... who even climbed the fence so that he could let his supporters know that the footballers were with them'.⁹⁴ By contrast, the actions of Kuže and his players were praised in one readers' letter, whilst *Sprint* justified their behaviour on the basis of the alleged police brutality to which they were witnesses.⁹⁵ Čolović notes that Boban and Salja were also customarily highlighted as 'examples of abandonment to nationalistic passions' in the Belgrade press during this period.⁹⁶ Three months later Boban would famously clash with the police again at Maksimir, an act which led to his vilification by the Serbian media and deification by a section of Croat nationalists.

It is perhaps fitting to leave the last words on the day's events to the head of the Novi Sad police administration, for they perfectly encapsulate the nationalist rhetoric which was in common usage during these post-Yogurt Revolution days:

⁹¹ Bakmaz, „Исти третман према свима”, *Дневник*

⁹² Adamović, D. cited in: *Ibid.*

⁹³ Ковац, „Ладнх оверно бод запретчана”, *Дневник*

⁹⁴ Predojević, „Камера на стадиону Војводине”, *Дневник*

⁹⁵ Dean Terzić – Novi Sad, „Једна димна није разлог”, *Sprint*, Tironi, „'Promani' u uniformi”, *Sprint*

⁹⁶ Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, p. 262

I would recommend to the Dinamo members that if they worry about "their children" so much, before every trip in the future let them make them forget the intention to smash shop windows, cabins; to not attack photographs of Slobodan Milošević in shop windows without reason; to think carefully where they can shout "Slobo, Srbine čakije ti ne gine", "Azem, Azem", "Kosovo is a Republic" and similar slogans. This climate is highly sensitive to that, and before the match Dinamo supporters behaved in just this way.⁹⁷

The language of the Yogurt Revolution which is employed here reminds the reader of the fact that the Socialist Autonomous Province of Vojvodina had been taken over by Milošević loyalists the previous winter and that "autonomist" police chiefs and media bosses had been purged from their positions of power in the resultant "reforms".⁹⁸ Returning to Adamović's recommendations, it should be noted that they were to fall on deaf ears. The following months would prove that these incidents in Novi Sad were merely a dress rehearsal for what was to come.

The Beginning of the End

According to "Red Firm" members, the match between Vojvodina and Dinamo was 'just the introduction – there were many other games like this, and then it all broke down in the Maksimir'.⁹⁹ That this is a reasonably accurate description of the period is proved by the pages of contemporary periodicals and newspapers, which are full of details concerning the many nationalism fuelled incidents which occurred in stadiums across Yugoslavia over the following months. Indeed, on the very same day as the game in Novi Sad, a match in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia between Vardar Skopje and Red Star was also marred by crowd trouble and ethnic chanting.¹⁰⁰ The deteriorating political situation in the country only added to this

⁹⁷ Adamović, D. cited in: Bakmaz, „Исти третман према свима”, *Дневник*. Silber and Little note that following the Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution, 'Milošević attained almost divine status ... Suddenly he was everywhere. His photograph or portrait, often both, hung in every store window, in trucks, offices and government buildings.' Silber & Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, p. 60

⁹⁸ Kerenji, "Vojvodina Since 1988", p. 355

⁹⁹ Ognjen, Miroslav and Nebojša – Red Firm, FK Vojvodina Supporters' Group, Novi Sad, Serbia, 8 November 2007.

¹⁰⁰ Dragan Todorović – Belgrade, „Sport treba da zblizava", *Tempo*

phenomenon and by the time of HDZ's April 1990 election victory in Croatia, games which featured Serb and Croat teams rarely passed without incident. The Maksimir Stadium Riot of May 1990 was the climactic event for Yugoslav football hooliganism and it foreshadowed the country's fate, as Zdenko Mahmet – who was Dinamo President at the time – predicted:

The war of Dinamo and Red Star supporters was a serious warning to politicians; it will be a prologue to a possible apocalypse if reason does not win over stupidity and spiritual breadth over the chauvinists' narrow-mindedness.¹⁰¹

However, the events surrounding Vojvodina's own encounter against Dinamo must be seen as a genuine precursor to the violence in Zagreb. As has been demonstrated, on the streets of Novi Sad – three months before Maksimir – Dinamo's "Bad Blue Boys" traded nationalist insults with Serbian supporters, clashed with the police and were heavily criticised by the Serbian press. Moreover, the subsequent media conflict over the conduct of both the police and of Dinamo's players bears an uncanny resemblance to the partisan debates which would rage over Maksimir.

The onset of war over the summer of 1991 meant the end of the Yugoslav First Federal League as it resulted in the withdrawal of Croat and Slovene teams. The following year also witnessed the departure of Macedonian clubs, along with all but one of Bosnia and Hercegovina's teams.¹⁰² A league consisting of Serbian and Montenegrin clubs continued to operate throughout the conflict, but this competition was a shadow of its former self. FK Vojvodina endured a collapse in spectator numbers. During the victorious 1988–89 season the club enjoyed average attendances of 9,294, but by April 1992 a meagre crowd of just 500 souls watched their team struggle to a 1:0 victory over local rivals Spartak Subotica.¹⁰³ "Red Firm" members note that the difficulties imposed by sanctions, inflation and war made such a crowd figure typical during this period. It was truly the end of an era for Yugoslavia, Vojvodina and the club which bears its name.¹⁰⁴

Whilst FK Vojvodina has never again reached the heights of 1989, the club has continued to represent Novi Sad in both the Serbian Premier League and in European competitions ever since. In the spring of 2009

¹⁰¹ Mahmet, Z. cited in: Kos, „Грех губитишња“, *Споменски Журнал*

¹⁰² FK Borac Banja Luka continued to play in the Yugoslav federal leagues for a number of seasons.

¹⁰³ This average for the 1988–89 season is derived from by collating the individual match attendances in: Todorović & Gavrilović, *Очајдецем српско-босанског народа*

¹⁰⁴ Christian Axboe Nielsen has examined the broader political developments surrounding Serbian football since the outbreak of war in 1991: Nielsen, "The goalposts of transition"

Vojvodina's supporters celebrated two important anniversaries. Firstly they marked twenty years since the founding of the "Red Firm" supporters' group.

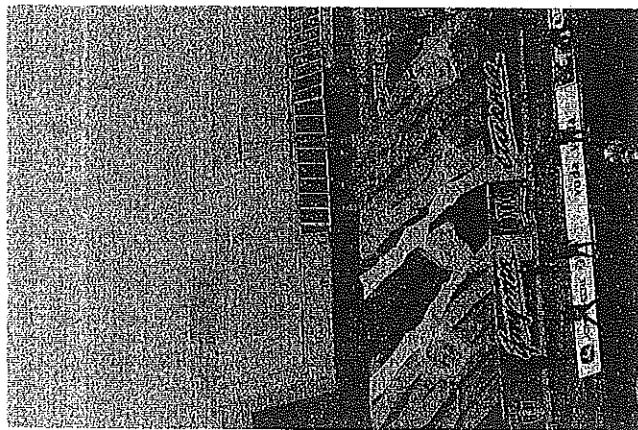


Figure 6: The Vojvodina supporters' group, today united under the name "Firma 1989", celebrate 'twenty years of experience' during FK Vojvodina's 2009 match against FK Javor Ivanjica. The twentieth anniversary of the founding of the "Red Firm" supporters' group took place earlier in the year.

This was followed swiftly by celebrations in honour of the club's First Federal League title of 1989. Politically, the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina has been slowly regaining its autonomy ever since the fall of Milošević in 2000, and in 2009 Serbia's parliament ratified a new statute of autonomy for the province. To conclude, it may be stated that the history of FK Vojvodina during the period under examination is inseparably entwined with the history of Novi Sad and the (Socialist) Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. It may also be stated that via an examination of the historical developments surrounding football clubs and their supporters, it is often possible to gain a unique perspective into the political and social history of a particular region during times of acute political upheaval.

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ФК „Војводина”, „Red Firm” и ПОСЛЕДИЦЕ
„ЈОГУРТ РЕВОЛУЦИЈЕ”: 1988–1991.

САЖЕТАК: У чланку се описује буран период у историји новосадске „Војводине”. Користећи оновремену штампу као историјски извор, а уједно и усмена сведочења навијача „Воше”, аутор смешта догађаје везане за ФК „Војвдину” у шири историјски контекст, показујући да су политички догађаји, као што је „Јогурт револуција” из 1988. године, имали велики утицај на сам клуб. Упоредо са тим, у тексту је приказана појава навијачке групе „Red Firm”, од њеног оснивања током шампионске сезоне 1988/89, преко њене „пројугословенске” фазе, до коначног склизнућа ка национализму и хулиганству. У вези са тим, аутор се усредсредио на само један догађај – утакмицу између „Војводине” и загребачког „Динама” која је била први спортски сусрет у Новом Саду који су обележили озбиљни политички мотивисани инциденти између српских и хрватских навијача. Сматра се да је то била својеврсна проба за злогласне нереде на „Максимиру”, до којих је дошло три месеца касније. Шире гледано, циљ овог рада је да укаже на користи истраживања дешавања везаних за одређени фудбалски клуб и његове навијаче, а у намери да се стекне дубљи увид у политичку и друштвену историју једног региона, у времену жестоких политичких превирања.

КЉУЧНЕ РЕЧИ: фудбал, ФК „Војводина”, Нови Сад, Југославија, САП Војводина, „Red Firm”, „Јогурт револуција”